

## Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Jan 5th 2016

Memorial of Saint John Neumann, Bishop

Two days ago we celebrated the Epiphany, which traditionally is celebrated tomorrow. Next Sunday we will recall the Baptism of Jesus into His life of giving life. Today's Gospel presents Jesus in a quite famous story, taking five loaves and two fish and feeding them to thousands.

Mark Twain once wrote that the difference between a cat and a lie is that the cat has only nine lives. A truth has a long life as well. The crowds have heard Jesus' Truth, His deeds of healing. They see Jesus and His disciples getting into a boat. The crowd knows where they are going and gets there before the boat and its passengers arrive. It is worthwhile to consider why they were interested in Jesus and what they sought.

The friends of Jesus have just returned from doing and celebrating the Truth of Jesus and He sees that they need some healing rest themselves. When they arrive at the "lonely" place they find it is not lonely any more.

The Greek verb Mark uses for Jesus' seeing the crowd literally means that Jesus was moved in His guts where deep emotions of reception and love are rooted. Mark does not say that Jesus "met" them, "understood" them, "felt sorry for" them. He experienced them, not as problems or interruptions, but as lost and wandering persons. In the history of the people of Israel, good things have happened in the desert. Mark presents Jesus as teaching them many things first. He knew their hearts were hungry more than they might have known. Jesus was moved to offer them the food of His truth which would nourish them more than the bread and fish.

This story is about Jesus' teaching His disciples that they are as poor as having five loaves and two fish and such a large crowd to feed. They desire to avoid their poverty by having Jesus send the hungry crowd away to forage for themselves while they would eat the fish-burgers themselves. If they are going to be persons extending His mission of mercy, care and nourishing, then they have to first receive from the Bread-of-Life to be sent as Bread-Persons into the surrounding villages of this world. Jesus is instructing His disciples that they cannot give Him away without first having received their poverty and then His riches.

We never stop learning this lesson. The disciples had just returned from their doing wonderful deeds themselves which must have been quite an experience of their riches. Mark is recounting this event to encourage his faith community, fragile as it was by being under persecution, to trust their poverty. Tomorrow's Gospel will be a more frightening experience of learning the same trust-lesson.

In praying this Gospel-setting in the past, I am one of the disciples who withdraws a few steps to watch the others try to dissuade Jesus from having the crowds sit down. I withdraw a little farther not wanting to enter into this shame-show. "There just isn't enough bread, face the facts!" Jesus looks at me from His guts as well and invites me back into the distribution center. Faith begins with the acceptance of our poverty and leads to letting Him do much with our little. When I cannot accept my little, then my faith is less. This is His truth and it has more lives more than a cat.

Larry Gillick-Creighton University's Deglman Center for Ignation Spirituality